DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 172 427 EA 011 859

AUTHOR Yinqling, Walter S.
TITLE The Role of Principals in Politics.
PUB DATE 25 Mar 79
NOTE 16p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the National Association of Elementary School Principals (Washington, D.C., March 24-28, 1979); Pages 5 and 7 may be marginally legible

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Administrator Role; Elementary Secondary Education; Political Influences; Political Power; Principals
IDENTIFIERS Politics of Education

ABSTRACT

This talk uses humor to draw attention to the principal's responsibility and potential in promoting adequate education legislation. Knowledge of the issues in current legislation, contact with legislators, and organized action by administrators' associations are among the topics commented on. (PGD)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED172427

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

THE ROLE OF PRINCIPALS IN POLITICS

ABSTRACT

by Walter S. Yingling, Ph. D.

It is necessary today for principals to take more active roles in politics for the benefit of the school children in our nation.

There are types of involvement appropriate for everyone. At the local level everyone should become more knowledgeable about education related state and federal legislation. It is also important for everyone to communicate with their state and federal legislators on significant issues. Relations can also be established through such things as meals with legislators as guests.

Involvement in the formal state and federal legislation network should be the responsibility of several representatives from each local administrator's association. These representatives should keep the local membership informed and move them to action as needs arise.

Each state association should consider the establishing of a separate political action arm with a lobbyist to work directly with legislators.

Numbers count in politics. Organized effort by principals could be a significant positive force in legislative affairs.

EA 011 859

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

W. Yingling

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

THE ROLE OF PRINCIPALS IN POLITICS

The topic for this presentation gives us a relatively new challenge for our nation's already overworked and certainly underpaid elementary principals. You say, "I'm already doing the jobs my secretary, custodian, the policeman, environmentalist, fireman, minister, doctor, teachers, superintendent, and the parents of my students should be doing, and now you want me to find time to be a politician? Forget it! There just isn't enough time now to do what I have to do."

There was a principal who retired after 40 years of catching the 7:30 a.m. train. On the first morning of his retirement when his wife placed his plate in front of him he said he wished she would serve his eggs over easy. "My dear," she exclaimed, "why didn't you tell me before." "I never had time," he replied.

One role in politics we aren't going to deal with today is the actual holding of any elected public office. This is not to say that principals shouldn't seek office. Where else do you get to vote your own salary increase? Seriously, principals have held many offices, including seats on Boards of Education, and have made great contributions to our society and to education by doing so. I suppose we should consider that electing principals to office might result in meaningful tax reform. Lord knows there is a need. If Patrick Henry thought taxation without representation was bad, he should see it with representation. Anyway, getting elected to office is not possible for everyone nor is it necessarily desirable.

Let's consider some basic kinds of involvement for principals in politics. First, principals need to become much more knowledgeable about legislation and pending legislation. If your state association is operating properly you are already receiving such information from it regularly. If you don't have such a source, better push for whatever it takes to get it. And, when legislative information comes across your desk, take the time to read it.

Think about how proposals will affect your school and its work with kids. If we don't keep kids in the picture there are few in our entire society who will today, including our politicians. If you really analyze it you'll find even historically our nation has never done much more than pay lip service to the education of our children. It's not easy for the politician. Just try sitting on a fence and keeping your ear to the ground. Most of our people also have troubles. Their finances are in such a mess today you'd think they were getting advice from the government.

Once you analyze a bill that is pending you have three things you can do. Sit and wait if it looks good. Write or call your legislator if it looks bad, or write him to give him ideas he has not yet thought of. These are ways you and your associations can share the load.

The following chart will help you gain some perspective of the spectrum of involvement in politics from each of us up to and including the NAESP.

FEDERAL RELATIONS NETWORK ROLE AND RESPONSIBILITIES

	ON THE NATIONAL LEVEL	PROVIDES TO THE STATE ASSOCIATION	PROVIDES TO THE LOCAL OR KEY CONTACT
NAESP	--Acts as spokesman --On-the-scene observer --On-the-scene reporter --Coordinator --Seeks and works with coalitions on an issue basis --Meets with other administrator associations federal relations staff --Works with Congressional staff on proposed legislation --Works with federal agencies on rules, regulations, and special projects	For Federal Matters: --Provides analytical/background information --Provides structure for participation in federal arena --Coordinates state efforts in the federal arena --Involves members, through Delegate Assembly action, in federal policy formulation --Plans and presents workshops For State Concerns --Offers advice in developing state organization for state political activity --Provides information relating to state legislative concerns --Provides staff consultation and program participation --Assists in developing language for legislative proposals	For Federal Matters: --Provides analytical/background information --Provides advice for developing effective working relationships with Congressmen --Alerts networkers to action needs --Assists with individual problems
STATE	--Helps identify individuals willing to work in Network --Helps formulate recommendations on federal policy --Assists in two-way communication process --Provides support for federal relations activities at the state level --Utilizes federal relations resources in communications and programs	--Develops state legislative activity program --Acts as state observer, reporter, coordinator, spokesman --Fulfills other responsibilities according to state association policy --Provides training programs on legislative process for its members	--Provides information and advice --Alerts members to action needs --Assists with individual concerns
LOCAL	--Provides grass roots support for legislative programs through working with Congressmen --Responds to inquiries and requests from NAESP	--Provides grass roots support for state legislative program --Responds to requests from Federal Relations Coordinators	--Serves as local disseminator --Involves other principals in action needs

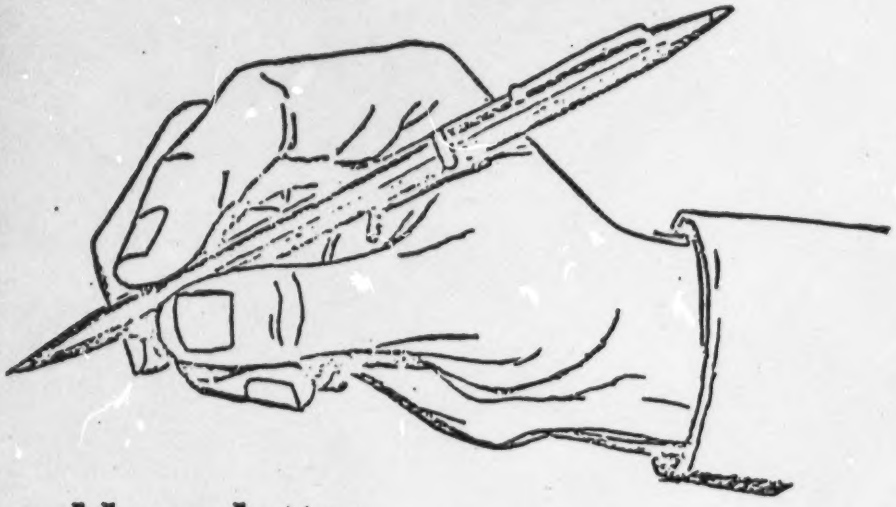
For those who have never been actively involved let me clear up some misconceptions. If you feel that politics is nothing but a matter of mud, threat, and smears you'll try to avoid it. You should keep in mind that principals and politicians have a lot in common. Don't the qualifications for being a politician given by Winston Churchill also apply to you and I? He said, "It is the ability to foretell what will happen tomorrow, next month, next year - - and to explain afterward why it did not happen." Politicians do have their problems and your thoughts and input often can be of real assistance. Each of us has our own picture of "Politician," but they are, after all, human beings like you and I somewhere between saint and sinner.

If you haven't been involved here are a few suggestions to get you started.

Get the names and addresses of your United States and state senators and your U.S. Congressman and state representative. Be sure you use the proper form on all correspondence. Write a letter to these legislators introducing yourself briefly and offer input if it is needed. Explain that you intend to write when there is a pending bill that is significant to education.

The proper form and some Do's and Don't's are shown on the following page.

When You Write Your Legislator



address letter

United States Senator:

The Honorable (full name)
Senate Office Building
Washington,D.C., 20510
Dear Senator. . . . . .

U.S. Congressman:

The Honorable (full name)
House Office Building
Washington,D.C., 20515
Dear Mr. . . . . .

State Senator:

The Honorable (full name) or
Senator . . . .
The State House
Columbus, Ohio 43215
Dear Senator or
Dear Mr. . . . .

State Representative:

The Honorable (full name) or
Representative from district
The State House
Columbus, Ohio 43215
Dear Sir or
Dear Mr. . . . .

LETTERS ARE THE LIFEBLOOD of almost every legislative office. For most lawmakers, they are the only real communication a legislator has with those he represents. It is not enough for him to know who is for or against proposed laws. He also would like to know why this stand was taken if he is to do his job to the best of his ability.

Every letter that reaches a legislator's desk exemplifies the vitality of one of our most cherished rights—the right of free speech and opinion. Letters vary in their impact, but all of them help to strengthen and humanize the bond between Government and Citizen which is so necessary to a proper functioning of democracy.

Legislators welcome letters from people interested in proposals before them.—To be most helpful such letters should be short, should clearly state the position of the writer for or against the proposal, and should briefly present the reasons.

Laws have been passed or killed on the basis of a single well-written letter. . . . One thoughtful, factual well-reasoned letter carries more weight than 100 form letters or printed postcards.

DO'S

1. Do know your legislator's full name. Spell it correctly.
2. Do inform yourself about the measure of concern to you. Know what you are talking about.
3. Do use plain stationery or personal stationery. If you are writing as the representative of a group, use organization stationery.
4. Do use first class mail or air mail.
5. Do let the legislator know how a particular measure will affect your locality—his own home district.
6. Do be concise.
7. Do be complete enough to give pertinent reasons and facts.
8. Do be sincere.
9. Do be courteous always.
10. Do clearly identify the bill, using the title and number, if possible.
11. Do follow through. Let your legislator know you are watching his record with deep interest.
12. Do write a letter of appreciation whenever your legislator does something that meets your approval.

DON'T'S

1. Don't guess at the spelling of your legislator's name or his initials.
2. Don't guess at facts or base your letters on rumors.
3. Don't use mimeographed letters or printed postal cards; they give no evidence that you can think for yourself.
4. Don't use form letters under any circumstances.
5. Don't limit yourself to generalities.
6. Don't be wordy.
7. Don't leave out essential details.
8. Don't use insincere flattery or flowery terms.
9. Don't use threats—ever!
10. Don't get mixed up on the name, the number, or the contents of the bill.
11. Don't write letters of criticism or request only.
12. Don't forget to write a thank-you letter.

Legislators are aware that elementary principals are a group of educators outnumbered only by teachers. And, in the political game where numbers count, we can be a significant positive force for education.

I do wish to stress the idea, positive force. We cannot neglect the negative attitudes toward education many citizens exhibit today. I firmly believe that principals, by continuing to vigorously pursue what is good for kids, can eliminate some of the negative. This should help improve the image of educators and education and, in the process, help elementary principals where they need help in salary and welfare matters.

You may think I'm naive to believe anyone can change the image of education. One politician was rather pessimistic about his ability. When asked by a reporter whether he felt he had influenced public opinion he replied, "No, public opinion is like driving a mule. In order to keep up the appearance of being the driver, you have to watch which way he is going and follow closely." If you are an optimist that at least warns you that the job isn't going to be easy.

One fundamental you must already know is that politicians have a very highly organized club of their own. If any of us are to succeed in influencing the course of any legislation, we must be organized at the local, state and national levels. Right now the political machine continues to triumph because it is a united minority acting against a divided majority.

So, individually each principal must keep informed, know his state and federal legislators and communicate with them.

However, that only partially takes care of the demand because we are talking about the need to be organized.

At the local level your association should have a legislative chairman. The legislative chairman should be just a bit more informed, a bit more active, and certainly better acquainted with the legislators than the others locally. He should be in touch regularly with at least your state association. He should be the one to report and update at your local association meetings, and should stir you to action when the need arises.

Consider the action which almost robbed each of our states of our retirement systems to bail out the ailing Social Security program. A tremendous and united action of telephone calling, letter writing and telegram communications with the federal legislators turned the tide decisively. Always remember, a politician has to see both sides of an issue if he is to get around it.

There was an effort on the part of big business to promote the takeover of our retirement systems or to include us in social security, so we must continue to be alert.

Since politics is the art of looking for trouble, finding it everywhere, diagnosing it incorrectly, and applying the wrong remedies we could be facing a problem.

In this case we must not only communicate with our legislators. We must also communicate with business.

In Ohio the employee contributes 8.5% of his salary to retirement and the Board of Education 13.5% for a total of 22%. Nationally the employee and employer each contribute 6.14% for a total nearly 10% less. If Social Security were to get that additional 10% from their contributors it would seem unlikely that they would need ours. Here you have a real and vital example of the need for political action.

Due process is another classic example of legislation which came down from on high with little or no grassroots input. Are you happy with it? I rest my case on that issue.

Locally there are things you should do regularly once organized. You are limited only by your imagination. Here are two things that have been successful.

Law Day come in May each year. Our school invited our state representative, a township trustee, a judge, and a policeman to be with us. They were to describe their roles to the children in our K to 4 building and relate at least one very interesting incident in their experience. After that there was a brief question and answer session. Then each man was assigned a grade level to go to for more questions and answers. The kids loved it, gained tremendously and the guests felt it was very worthwhile. I'd suggest getting a nice 5 X 7 black and white photo of each man in action and sending it to him with a thank you letter. Politicians usually have such pictures hanging in their offices.

We also regularly hold dinners with our local legislators as guests. The only program is aquestion and answer session after the meal. Caution: Numbers do count. Don't try this unless you can get at least 20,

preferably 30 or more, principals to come out. Do try something. You may enjoy being political bedfellows -- Political Bedfellows - Those who share the same bunk.

Lets turn to the state level. The Ohio Association hired an assistant executive director several years ago. His primary role is to lobby. Since then we have organized a political action arm, the Elementary Principals' Action League.

Our lobbyist is known now by all the key people in the state senate and house. He wines and dines them. His operating philosophy is to deal only with the honest politician. You know what an honest politician is don't you? That's one who when bought, stays bought.

The lobbyist testifies before senate and house committees on education bills and works with lefislators on the language in those bills. He also works on bills the legislators haven't thought of and works to see these through the legislative mill.

In the old days when a kid was in the principal's office it meant the kid was in trouble. Too often now it means the principal is in trouble. Help for the troubled principalship must come through legislation. To carry out our mission with and for kids we must be able to administer our buildings and to be instructional leaders.

Principals must be willing to testify before legislative committees on important bills. Not everyone has to do this, but we do need more or our number involved in this activity. Having a political action arm is one way to have input to the state legislative machine.

The political action arm in Ohio also supports the campaigns of

legislators who have pro-principal attitudes or whose track record is pro-principal, pro-quality education. This has also made principals know... I've attended numerous cocktail parties and dinner fundraisers for our political friends.

While it is true that some political promises go in one year and out the other, we've made real progress at the state level. Our initial contacts brought good advice and encouragement from the legislators. "Get your act together," one said. "The teachers and superintendents are organized. You'd better organize too," said another.

Ohio has its political action arm divided into 10 state zones. I've been the zone 8 director and vice president since the organization was formed. Zone directors serve as membership chairmen and contact people in their zone. Since the state association cannot financially support lobbying efforts our operating funds must come from individual and local association memberships in E.P.A.L.

We've learned to know and respect our legislators. Despite all the jokes here today we've learned that they do indeed have a difficult job and a real dilemma. Dilemma - That's a politician trying to save both his faces at once.

That little joke points out a fact of political life. Your legislator is bombarded with input from many opposing groups and individuals, most of them highly organized. He must listen, do his own research, decide what is best and support his decision by his vote at roll call.

Whether we're talking state or federal legislation you must keep

in mind that if principals are not organized, then the teachers, superintendents, and school boards are, by default, lobbying for us. Ask yourself if you are comfortable with that one.

At the national level there is also the legislative network of which I am a part and also that lobbying effort. Again, organization is the key. Contact people like myself serve as liason between the local people and the federal scene. Our state political action arm is a state and federal legislative contact and feeds information to the local level on both. It also communicates directly with each individual principal requesting assistance when there is a legislative crisis.

Principals can no longer afford to be a divided majority. Collective bargaining and due process for teachers is growing on one side of us and the power and influence of superintendents and boards of education is squeezing us from the other.

I'm proud to be an elementary principal because I believe we represent what is perhaps the sole remaining group of true child advocates. Research shows that a building is more the reflection of the principal than any other single force. I happen to believe that's good. If we all stand to be counted for the good of kids we can have some impact on the forces which could be squeezing the very life out of the principalship and bringing the final end to our role as instructional leaders.

If the worst comes we are all going to find it necessary to become business managers acting more for the dollar than for the child. If that should happen I'm going to look for a new horizon; a new way to

earn my keep.

One politician said, "There are hundreds of ways to make money, but only one honest way." "What's that?" asked his opponent in debate. "Aha!" retorted the first, "I thought you wouldn't know."

I hope you've gained some useful information and that I may have moved the inactive to action and the active to dedication. This government is ours whether it be local, county, state or federal.

Principals have jobs to do in keeping current on legislation, involving legislators in local activities, corresponding regularly with state and federal legislators and in getting strong, viable state and national political action arms organized.

Judge Luther Youngdahl said, "Most of us don't understand that we will get just as bad government as we are willing to stand for and just as good government as we are willing to fight for."

I started in the political game several years ago when I was the principal of an elementary school here in Washington, D.C. and I can tell you from experience that the hardest thing to do in all this is to break the ice. If any of my legislator friends hear about these jokes I may end where I began.

There are legislators who are willing to listen to us. They are friends and believe in kids as our future just as we do.

I'd like to close with the following by the Reverend Hugh Price Hughes:

> "You cannot help being a politician. You cannot live for an hour without being a politician. But what a man generally means when he says that he is not a politician is this - that he has been all his life enjoying his political privileges and grossly neglecting his political duties; and in that sense the observation is scarcely

"to his credit. As a matter of fact, politics, properly understood, is simply Science of Life - the doctrine of the way in which I am to do my duty to my neighbor, which is an essential part of true religion. It is nothing in the world except religion applied to human society; in fact, it is the practical recognition of the Second Table of the Law of God."